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LB 283

SENATOR CUDABACK PRESIDING

SENATOR CUDABACK: Thank you, Senator Jensen. You've heard the opening on AM1737 to LB 283. Those wishing to speak are Senators Thompson, Hartnett, Chambers, Dwite Pedersen, Kruse, Cunningham, Landis, Tyson, and Johnson. Senator Thompson.

SENATOR THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the body. I've been on the Appropriations Committee for three years. This year, from January to when we voted on the bill, I only had one senator talk to me about something that should be cut. If you don't have those ideas, if you haven't gone to the Appropriations Committee members, at least help us figure out how we're going to fill that budget gap and get to some of the root problems that are costing the state money. When people say to you why does the... is the state spending more, this is one of the reasons. We have been filling up our prisons. We aren't treating. We aren't doing preventative things in the community and it's costing us money. The area that I've worked in tends to be more the criminal justice and juvenile justice system on this particular issue, so that's what I'm going to talk about, because that costs us a lot of money. In a study done of the children and youth offenders in the YRTC's... those are the facilities that we are paying for. We pay for staff 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Thirty-two percent of female offenders had psychiatric medical problems; 63 percent had mild/moderate mental health symptoms; 80 percent were diagnosed with chemical abuse dependency, 80 percent of the females; and 84 percent of those with chemical dependency had a dual diagnosis, and that means they had mental illness, mental health issues. And what happens, and I'm going to read the male statistics that are very similar, is that people with mental illness try to treat themselves to feel better and so we need to treat both mental illness and substance abuse together with this population. Fourteen percent of the male offenders had psychiatric medical problems; 90 percent had mild/moderate mental health symptoms; 84 percent were diagnosed with chemical abuse dependency; and 76 percent of those with chemical dependency had dual diagnosis. These facilities need the ability to treat while the kids are there. We've done a few things in recent years to try to boost that, but it hasn't been enough. They need more counselors.